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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: KHOST: DIFFERING REACTIONS TO CIVILIAN CASUALTIES
OFFER ROOM FOR MANEUVER

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Classified By: PRT-Sub National Governance Counselor Valerie C. Fowler
for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Khosties' vastly different reactions to civilian casualty incidents caused by Coalition Forces (CF) versus those caused by insurgents suggest fear and intimidation by insurgents are profoundly impacting the population. Team Khost (PRT and maneuver battalion), at the direction of Task Force Yukon, is implementing measures to increase security presence and operations and refine Information Operations (IO) by both CF and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in an effort to shift the population to more proactively embrace the government and reject the insurgency. END SUMMARY.

Background

12. (C) Two recent high profile civilian casualty incidents in Khost province provoked markedly different reactions among Khosties. An April 9 night operation conducted by CF in Gorbuz district resulted in the accidental death of four members of an Afghan National Army (ANA) lieutenant colonel's family. In response, the Provincial Council (PC) suspended operations, upper and lower house members of the Khost parliamentary delegations walked out of sessions in Kabul, and public condemnation from all levels--the average Khostie to President Karzai--was harsh. On May 12, insurgent suicide bombers, armed with grenades and AK-47s, staged a dramatic two-pronged attack on the office of Khost Governor Hamidullah Qalandarzai and the Khost municipality building, resulting in nine Afghans dead and 25 wounded. The reaction to this event, in contrast, was minimal public protest or outcry and only muted official condemnation.

CF vs. Insurgent Civilian Casualties: What's the Difference?

13. (C) In discussions with dozens of Khosties in seven districts over the past month, Afghan laborers, PC members, district administrators, elders, and academics provided notably consistent views on why the reactions to civilian casualties caused by CF were much stronger than those caused by insurgents, citing three main differences.

14. (C) Khosties expect CF to live up to high standards and are critical when we fail to do so, while they expect insurgents to observe no standards. Khosties noted that CF are a defined presence with relationships to the local community whereas insurgents have no "fixed address" at which to direct protest. Finally, Khosties cited fear and intimidation by insurgents

as their strongest reasons for not reacting strongly to the killing of innocent civilians by the enemy. Night letters, the blasting of gates of peoples' compounds, and threats of beheading and other brutalities generate real fear that insurgents will carry out harsh reprisals against anyone who speaks out publicly against their activities.

Implications for CF and GIROA

¶5. (C) These views are useful indicators of where the USG can influence public opinion on the difficult civilian casualties issue. When asked what would reduce their fear, Khosties uniformly stressed the need for more prominent and continual presence by CF and ANSF. They noted that short-term operations often had only temporary effects.

¶6. (C) Information Operations (IO) efforts which focus predominantly on negative enemy actions may be counterproductive. Emphasizing what insurgents consider success stories often reinforces the fear they seek to instill and highlights the GIROA's inability to protect the people. Condemnation of enemy actions by GIROA officials, religious leaders, elders, and ordinary Afghans should remain a part of our efforts, with effective initiatives such as TF Yukon's Voices of Victims radio interviews expanding in reach. PRT Khost works to develop GIROA officials' media skills and responsiveness through mentoring and media training to ensure constructive Afghan messages quickly reach the public. Increased ANSF security success stories, as well as stories emphasizing positive developments in ANSF professional enhancement, construction, development, and economic opportunity, also are needed. TF Yukon recently began creating a monthly video illustrating successful ANSF efforts to protect the population.

¶7. (C) To meet Khosties' call for more visible security

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forces, Afghan National Police (ANP) and ANA forces must commit to sustained presence throughout the province, with increased patrols and fewer missions spent staffing checkpoints, protecting GIROA officials, and key buildings. ANA Khost Commander General Esrar has made a concerted effort recently to move his soldiers off their bases and into the populace, with more regular patrols and increased night missions. CF and ANSF are working together to close isolated outposts and relocate those forces to protect the population centers. ANP mentors are developing beat-cop tactics in Khost police to improve public perceptions of their presence and effectiveness. This more community-based policing model allows ANP to develop the relationships which build trust and confidence in ANP reliability and which fosters an environment in which citizens cooperate with police to share information on enemy activity, making villages inhospitable to insurgents. ANSF leadership is shifting from a top-down command structure to one that allows commanders in the field more flexibility and authority to make decisions.

¶8. (C) A sustained, visible security effort, combined with a more coherent, positive information campaign, may create the space for Khosties, many of whom remain on the fence, to openly embrace the government and begin to turn the tide against the insurgency.

¶9. (U) This cable has been reviewed by PRT Khost CDR John Barrett, maneuver battalion commander LTC Stephen Smith, Department of State representative to TF Yukon, Kelly Degnan, PRT Khost USAID representative Teresa Miller, PRT Khost Information Officer Chief Warrant Officer Michael Lester, and TF Yukon commander, COL Michael Howard.
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